



Gifted Students With Disabilities Are We Finding Them?

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dvoates of gifted children have emphasized the importance of identifying and serving gifted students with disabilities in programs for the gifted and talented (Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts, & Wright, 1989; Coleman & Gallagher, 1992; Tallent-Runnels & Sigler, 1995). Gifted students with disabilities are a relatively new category among the gifted (Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994). Estimates of the number of gifted students with disabilities range from 120,000 to 180,000 (Davis & Rimm, 1994), to as many as 540,000 (Mnner, 1990). However, data supporting these estimates have been sparse. A review of the literature revealed only two statewide studies on the number of identified and served gifted students with specific learning disabilities; however, research efforts documenting all populations of gifted/disabled, including gifted/autistic, gifted/deaf/blind, gifted/developmentally delayed, gifted/emotionally disabled, gifted/hearing impaired, gifted/mentally retarded, gifted/multiple disability, gifted/speech or language impaired, gifted/traumatic brain injured, or gifted/visually impaired, were not present in the literature.

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Although advocates of gifted students with disabilities estimate the number of students identified in this population nationally, no evidence has been presented to document these numbers nationwide or within a state. Cline and Schwartz (1999) noted that schools have not succeeded in serving gifted students with disabilities largely because of the “inability to identify which students are gifted” and the “lack of attention to special populations of gifted that have been underserved,” including children with disabilities (p. 3). This lack of attention is evident in the paucity of research documenting the identification of these students.

Reis (2000) indicated that one possible difficulty in researching gifted students with disabilities, specifically learning disabilities, is the problem of “defining each population” (p. 208). Reis noted that both fields—gifted education and the education of students with learning disabilities—have separate definitions for students in those populations and differing terminology in their respective professional organizations and publications. Thus, semantics may play a part in the underrepresentation of gifted students with disabilities.

Federal funding has supported investigations of gifted students with disabilities in recent years, highlighting the importance of identifying these students and providing appropriate educational services. The U.S. Department of Education has offered the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program as a source of funding for state educational agencies, local educational agencies, institutions of higher learning, and other public and private agencies who seek to “carry out a coordinated program of scientifically based research demonstration projects, innovative strategies, and similar activities designed to build and enhance the ability of elementary and secondary schools nationwide to meet the special educational

needs of gifted and talented students,” including, in the second priority, disabled students (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 27546). The specific emphasis placed on this underrepresented group of gifted students and the financial support of the federal government (the estimated award size is \$250,000 per project per year) underscores the need for continued research to investigate these students and develop appropriate educational strategies.

Two statewide studies of one group of gifted students with learning disabilities have been conducted in Texas. Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts, and Wright (1989) surveyed gifted program coordinators and had a return rate of 32%. Seventy-seven percent of those responding had not identified any gifted students as having learning disabilities. They also reported the use of 21 different definitions of giftedness. At the time of the study, programs for the gifted in Texas were not mandated (it wasn't until 1990 that gifted education was mandated and guidelines were given for the identification of gifted students with learning disabilities).

In 1995, Tallent-Runnels and Sigler reported a similar study to determine if the new guidelines had any bearing on the identification of the gifted/learning disabled. They surveyed gifted program coordinators from 1,066 school districts. Of the 386 coordinators responding, 75 (49.7%) had gifted students with learning disabilities, 305 (80.35%) stated there were none, and 6 did not answer the question. Tallent-Runnels and Sigler indicated that little had happened with the identification of and delivery of services to gifted students with learning disabilities after the establishment of the guidelines in 1990. They stated that the identification statewide had dropped from 23% in 1989 as reported by Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts, and Wright to 19.7% in 1993 when their study was conducted. Additionally, districts that identified small percentages

of gifted children overall were also the least likely to identify gifted children with learning disabilities.

The Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to determine the number of gifted students with disabilities identified and served in gifted education programs in the state of Mississippi. Four categories of giftedness are set forth in the regulations for gifted programs:

- Intellectually gifted children refers to children and youth who are found to have an exceptionally high degree of intelligence as documented through the identification process.
- Academically gifted children are those who are found to have an exceptionally high degree of demonstrated academic ability as documented through the identification process.
- Artistically gifted children exhibit an exceptionally high degree of creativity and an exceptionally high degree of ability in the visual arts as documented through the identification process.
- Creatively gifted children are those children and youth who are found to have an exceptionally high degree of creativity and exceptionally high degree of ability in the performing arts (music, drama, or dance) as documented through the identification process (Mississippi Department of Education, 1994).

A draft of the survey instrument (see Appendix A) designed by the researchers was given to seven special education program directors for content validity. The suggestions offered were incorporated into the final version of the instrument. They also assisted in establishing the timeframe for dissemination. Surveys were sent to all 149 directors of public school district programs for the disabled in the state of Mississippi. These directors

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monitor the identification and services of disabled students in each district; in most districts in the state, they also monitor the identification and educational placement of gifted students. Surveys were mailed with response envelopes included; a 2-week return time was requested for completion of the instrument. For those not responding, another letter and the survey was forwarded with an additional 2 weeks for completion. For clarification, follow-up was conducted by phone, e-mail, and fax.

Results

Sixty percent of the school districts in Mississippi responded to the survey. Among the total reported enrollment of 319,469, there were 18,826 gifted students, representing 5.9% of the overall population, and 38,444 students with disabilities, representing 12% of the overall reported population. In addition to reporting the breakdown of disabled students in categories, each district also indicated students identified as both gifted and disabled. These were classified according to the four categories of giftedness recognized in the Mississippi definition of gifted and talented: intellectually gifted, academically gifted, artistically gifted, and creatively gifted.

The largest category of gifted students with disabilities identified was students with speech and language impairments. One hundred eighty-eight students were reported in this category over three areas of giftedness, accounting for 1.5% of the total speech-and-language-impaired population in the sample. In the second largest category, specific learning disabilities, respondents reported 86 students who were also intellectually, creatively, or artistically gifted. This accounted for only .5% of the total specific learning disabilities students. There were 9 students reported in the classification of gifted/autism across all four categories of gifted-

ness, which encompassed 3.3% of the sample of students with autism. Sixteen students were identified as both gifted and physically disabled, which was 1.4% of the total population of students with physical disabilities within the sample. These students were reported in all four categories of giftedness.

Other categories reported smaller numbers of students who were gifted and disabled. There was one student with a developmental delay reported who was also identified as intellectually gifted, which accounted for only .04% of the sample of students with developmental delays. Four students with emotional disabilities were also identified as intellectually gifted, which was .9% of the students with emotional disabilities. There were 6 students with hearing impairments who were also identified as gifted, accounting for 2% of the total population reported. Five artistically gifted students with mental retardation were reported, which was .1% of all students with mental retardation. No students with multiple disabilities were reported as being identified as gifted. Similarly, 2 students with traumatic brain injury were reported as artistically gifted. This was 2.2% of the total population of students with traumatic brain injury in the sample. Only 1 student was reported as both visually impaired and intellectually gifted. This was only .9% of the total population in the sample.

Among the areas of giftedness, 222 gifted students with disabilities were reported as intellectually gifted. Of the 16,900 intellectually gifted students reported in the survey, gifted students with disabilities account for 1.3%. Seventy students were classified as artistically gifted, representing 9.7% of the overall 722 students reported. Twenty-four gifted students with disabilities were reported as creatively gifted, which was 3.9% of the 615 students reported. Two out of 412 academically gifted stu-

dents were reported as being gifted with disabilities, accounting for .49%.

Overall, 318 students were reported in the state of Mississippi as being gifted students with disabilities. This accounts for 1.7% of the total gifted population and .8% of the total disabled population for the schools responding. It also reflects .1% of the total school population of Mississippi. Subgroups within the sample were too small for a statistical analysis to be conducted.

Discussion

Results of this study indicate that few gifted students with disabilities in Mississippi have been identified. To address this situation, more emphasis may be needed in training teachers of the gifted and regular classroom teachers in the characteristics of gifted students with disabilities, a suggestion also found in the literature (Cline & Schwartz, 1999). While some gifted certification programs may include coursework related to gifted students with disabilities, the variability in course requirements in the 28 states requiring certification ranges from a minimum of 6 hours to a maximum of 21, or, in some states, as determined by individual universities (Karnes, Stephens, & Whorton, 2000). Instructors of these courses in gifted education, particularly in states that require few hours in certification courses, may spend more time on issues pertaining to screening, identification, or instructional practices for the general population of gifted students, rather than on issues related to the gifted/disabled.

This lack of information about gifted students with disabilities in gifted coursework may lead to the underidentification of such students since teachers of the gifted, often the best recruiters for gifted programs in K-12 schools, may not be aware of their characteristics or how to screen them appropriately. Often, a

child's disability may mask his or her giftedness, which prevents him or her from being identified as gifted or leading to a misdiagnosis of the child's abilities (Silverman, 2000). To remedy this lack of information, staff development is recommended for teachers of the gifted, regular education teachers, and special education teachers in the characteristics, screening, and identification of and services for gifted/disabled students. Furthermore, graduate programs offering endorsements in gifted education should examine whether teachers of the gifted are provided information about gifted students with disabilities and make appropriate modifications to the certification program to include coursework in this area.

Awareness of gifted students with disabilities may also be increased through a child-find campaign directed toward the general public. Posters, op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, brochures, flyers, and fact sheets about the characteristics of gifted students with disabilities may heighten awareness of these students' needs, which may lead to increased identification.

States are encouraged to collect data about the prevalence of gifted students with disabilities served in public schools. This information may help coordinators of special programs for the disabled and the gifted recognize whether such students are being identified. Based on the results of this data collection, staff-development coordinators may design appropriate in-service opportunities for teachers based on increasing this population and appropriately serving those who have been identified for education in the regular, gifted, and special education classrooms (Clark, 2002). Attention should be given to training special education teachers in methods and materials for teaching the gifted, as "special classes for students who are visually impaired, communication disordered, hearing impaired, behavior disordered, emotionally disturbed, physically dis-

abled, and learning disabled very often have among their students children who are also gifted" (Clark, p. 553).

Teacher attitudes toward gifted students with disabilities have been discussed in the literature as critical components in these students' educational outcomes (Clark, 2002; Minner, Prater, Bloodworth, & Walker, 1987). Attention should be paid to assisting teachers in developing positive attitudes toward gifted students with disabilities (Minner et al.) through developing teachers' "knowledge of student abilities and disabilities and how these differences affect learning," as well as their understanding of "methods of disability compensation, [and] strategies for curricular modifications" (Clark, p. 554). Furthermore, educators should be made aware of the counseling needs of this population and their interactions with their disabled, normal, and gifted peers.

Awareness, identification, and education of gifted students with disabilities are growing areas of interest in gifted education. Efforts to increase the representation of these students can be bolstered through surveys of school districts, training of educators in the characteristics and developing the gifts of students with disabilities (see Appendix B), and a public relations campaign that educates the public about this group and how their needs may be met through appropriate practices in both gifted and special education (see Appendix C and Appendix D).

The survey instrument may serve as a model to researchers in other states. The categories of giftedness for the state using the survey should be substituted for the ones in this study. Following the instrument revision, the survey should be mailed to all state special education coordinators. After determining the number of presently identified gifted students with disabilities in a given state, administrators and teachers can then

take next step in ensuring that they receive the best education possible. 

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Appendix B Developing the Gifts of Gifted/LD Students

Suggestions for Teachers

- Use interest and learning-style inventories to become familiar with the strengths of the gifted students with disabilities. Make instructional decisions based on each student's learning preferences and learning style, which will help foster continued growth in the learners and allow them to develop their strengths. Be open to learning styles different from your own and incorporate these regularly in teaching. Solicit similar information about the student from his or her parent(s), who

Appendix A Survey Instrument

Disability Identified	Total number of students	Number of intellectually gifted	Number of academically gifted	Number of creatively gifted	Number of artistically gifted
Autism					
Deaf-blindness					
Developmentally delayed					
Emotional disability					
Hearing impairment					
Mental retardation					
Multiple disabilities					
Specific learning disability					
Physical disability					
Speech or language impairment					
Traumatic brain injury					
Visual impairment					
Gifted classification according to MS Dept. of Education	Number of students identified				
Intellectually gifted					
Academically gifted					
Creatively gifted					
Artistically gifted					
Total school district enrollment disabled					
Total school district enrollment gifted					
Total school district enrollment					

can provide background information about how the student learns best and how you can capitalize his or her strengths.

- Allow students choices in educational settings, which may allow them to highlight their individual strength area(s), some of which the teacher may not be aware of.
- Allow students the opportunity to select topics for investigations.
- Provide opportunities for students to select products to illustrate their

understanding of concepts.

- Encourage students to select from a variety of themes for group/independent study.
- Provide students the opportunity to investigate topics independently or with peers with similar interests. This offers students ownership in the learning process and may increase motivation, retention, and creativity.
- Integrate a variety of content areas into instruction, which will allow students the opportunity to connect

areas of related interest to the new concepts being studied.

- Discuss strategies for instructing students with disabilities with special education teachers, who will have a variety of accommodations, resources, and other information to assist you in appropriately serving gifted students with disabilities.

Suggestions for Parents

- Communicate with your child's teacher about how he or she learns most effectively and the accommodations that have been most successful in his or her previous educational settings.
- Encourage your child to develop friendships with other gifted students whose academic and extracurricular interests may be similar.
- Celebrate your child's academic strengths and talents by praising him or her for utilizing these gifts in and out of the classroom.
- Seek summer and weekend programs that serve gifted students. Such programming allows for the continued development of your child's gifts in a setting with his or her like-ability peers.
- Become a member of the local, state, and national associations for the gifted and participate in conferences for parents. Locate the organizations' Web sites and read information about how to meet your child's learning and social/emotional needs and how to advocate for appropriate instruction.

Appendix C Gifted/LD Web Sites

"Gifted Children With Learning Disabilities: A Review of the Issues"
by L. Brody and C. Mills
http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/gt_ld/jld_gtld.html

Many people have difficulty comprehending that a child can be gifted and also have learning disabilities. As a result, children with special needs that result from both their high abilities and their learning problems are rarely identified and are often poorly served. This article explores the current policies and practices with regard to defining, identifying, and educating this population. Recommendations are included that would help ensure that students who are gifted and have learning disabilities receive the intervention needed to help them achieve their full potential.

"Gifted and Learning Disabled: Twice Exceptional Students"
by D. Buckley
<http://www.sp.uconn.edu/~nrcgt/news/spring98/sprng984.html>

This article, which was featured in the 1998 spring newsletter of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut, discusses characteristics, identification, and curricular needs of gifted students with disabilities.

Gifted LD: Just the FAQs
http://www.ldinfo.com/gifted_ld.htm

This is a fact sheet addressing questions pertaining to gifted/learning-disabled students, including definitions, population, identification, assessments, services, behavior and emotional issues, parent guidelines, and out-of-school implications.

GT-Special Mailing List
<http://www.gtworld.org/gtspecialist.html>

GT-Special Mailing List is an electronic mailing list for the families of gifted and talented children with learning disabilities.

"Giftedness and Learning Disabilities" by J. Maker and A. Udall
http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/gt_ld/eric_digest427.html

This article focuses on the identification of gifted/learning-disabled students. Educational implications, solutions for classroom problems, parent help, and references are discussed.

Parents of Gifted/Learning Disabled Children
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/1105/gtld.html>

This page outlines goals of this parent advocate group.

Uniquely Gifted: Resources for Gifted Children with Special Needs
<http://www.uniquelygifted.org>

This resources Web site includes introductory comments concerning testing of twice-exceptional children, introductory articles, general resources, stories/poetry/personal experiences, and information on specific special needs.

Appendix D Further Readings

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